

2005

End-of-year report to the 4th Legislative District

Keeping our constituents informed

Rep. Larry Crouse

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Dear friends & neighbors,

With the 2005 legislative session and election in the books, we thought it would be a good time to touch base with you as the year comes to a close. We hope this newsletter finds you well and that you are looking forward to the holidays as much as we are.

The 2006 legislative session begins in early January and is scheduled to run 60 days. This session will be partly shaped by the recent initiatives that passed — or didn't pass. It will also address important issues such as sex offenders, election reform, health care, and our state's supplemental budget, among others. We discuss some of these issues in this newsletter.

In order to be your voice in Olympia, we need to hear from you. If you have any questions, concerns or comments, feel free to call or e-mail us anytime. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Rep. Larry Crouse

Rep. Lynn Schindler

Rep. Lynn Schindler

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Concerns about gas prices

Even though gas and diesel prices have come down recently, e-mails and phone calls are still coming in asking for an explanation of why prices remain at high levels.

We share your concerns and understand the price of fuel continues to be a strain on working families and small employers.

Congress is investigating the largest oil companies and recently called their representatives before a committee in Washington, D.C. to offer an explanation for the high profits they've enjoyed. We will continue to monitor this investigation as it evolves.

We strongly believe the public deserves to know all the facts about why their fuel prices are increasing. With this



in mind, at the urging of the Legislature and governor, our state attorney general's (AG) office recently undertook an investigation of gas prices to see whether oil companies were unfairly gouging consumers. Here is what it found:

High demand and tight supply

The country, as a whole, was experiencing a restricted supply of oil and gas — even before the hurricane disasters on the Gulf Coast. Demand for gas was steadily increasing as the summer driving season got into full swing, pushing gas prices up.

The West Coast is unique in that it has limited refineries and pipeline capacity. The AG found prices on the West Coast were higher than the rest of the country — mainly because the population in Washington, Oregon, and California has increased over the past 10 years, yet refinery capacity has decreased.

Unique conditions in 2005

Crude oil (the raw material for gas and diesel) prices reached record levels this year. These prices, combined with a low inventory of gasoline (stockpiles of gas at refineries to accommodate increased demand), pushed prices up to meet an increasing demand. Then when hurricanes hit the Gulf Coast knocking several refineries offline, it pushed the price of gas higher because supply was even more restricted.

Future monitoring

Our AG will continue to meet with oil representatives and attorneys general from other states to keep an eye on industry practices. The federal Department of Energy has also been asked to review oil company practices.

We will be watching these efforts and report any new developments to you.

Local transportation needs

As part of our push to bring more transportation money to the 4th District, we'd like to report the successful completion of improvements to I-90 from Argonne Road to Sullivan Road. The freeway was widened to three lanes and noise-reducing walls were installed. This project is part of an overall 13-mile package that will improve I-90 all the way to the Idaho border.

Some of the projects from the 2005 gas tax increase include:

- U.S. 395 – continued design of future construction projects for new highway within the 10.5-mile corridor.
- Replacing the S.R. 290/Spokane River Bridge
- Combining the Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroads into one rail corridor.

Initiative 912: repealing the new state gas tax

We are surprised voters chose to keep the new state gas tax. We voted against this gas tax in the 2005 session. We felt working families couldn't afford the extra financial burden and that increasing the gas tax was going to hurt our state's economic recovery.

In addition, we were disappointed Spokane County would only get about 3 percent of gas tax proceeds over the next ten years. We felt our district deserved more.

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Now that the voters have spoken and the gas tax is in place, we will monitor the distribution of transportation funds to ensure this money goes to help finance projects in our area.

Election reform needed

Our 2004 general election revealed some serious problems in our state's election processes. This resulted in an outcry from the public and prompted legislators to contemplate reforms in the 2005 legislative session.

A lot of good ideas came forth last session, but too few made their way through the legislative process. In fact, just two significant election reform bills passed. Unfortunately, neither goes far enough in addressing our major problems.

The bottom line is this: people need to know that when they cast votes, their votes will be counted — and counted correctly. Voting is an important cornerstone to our democracy and while it may never be perfect, we should always be looking for ways to improve it.

We still have election problems — and we will do all we can in the 2006 legislative session to see to it they are fixed. Here are five ideas we believe would lead to true election reform:

- Reregistering all voters by August 1, 2006.
- Requiring proof of citizenship at time of registration.
- Requiring voter photo ID at polls.
- Make clear this is a voter conduct state — not a voter intent state. If a voter does not follow voting instructions, such that the machines cannot count their vote, their vote will not count.
- Ensure every vote has a voter by requiring counties to reconcile the number of voters with the number of ballots cast.

District



Health care reform

This coming session, we will look at not only malpractice reform but also health care reform. It's important the Legislature look at ways to lower health care costs for working families and small employers.

We tried to push through a comprehensive health care reform package in the 2005 session, but the majority party rejected our efforts. Some of these ideas included health savings accounts, eliminating costly health insurance mandates, and small business tax incentives to employers who offer health care to employees.

We will try again in 2006 in order to make health care less of a burden on family finances.

Stronger laws for sex offenders

There is no worse crime than one perpetrated against a defenseless person — especially a child.

We continue to hear from concerned constituents who are worried about the threat of sex offenders in their neighborhoods. We echo your sentiments and will be supporting bills in the 2006 legislative session that will strengthen our state laws pertaining to sex offenders.

For example, we'll be considering making certain sex offenses a one "strike" and out scenario and strengthening sex offender registration requirements.

Being responsible with our state's supplemental budget

The supplemental budget is a mid-course adjustment to our state's two-year operating budget, with the latter written in odd-numbered years such as 2005. Normally, adjustments are minor and accommodate state needs, but don't impact policy. We hope this is the case in the 2006 legislative session.

There will always be philosophical differences in terms of spending for our state budgets. We continue to believe we need to fund our essential state services, while looking for savings in the process. Government needs to be accountable with — and good stewards of — the taxpayers' dollars.

This approach is similar to what families do — they pay their bills and save as much as they can. Both our state and families save money to assure a responsible amount of reserves are in place for unexpected events. We think our state can do a better job of this.



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What's most important to you?

Since 2006 is an election year, by law we are restricted in the amount of printed newsletters and e-mail updates we can send you. If you'd like, though, please send us your e-mail address so we can stay in touch with you in the future.

Name: _____

Address: _____

E-mail address: _____

To best serve you in the Legislature, we'd be grateful if you'd take a moment to complete the following question and return it to us at one of the addresses on the front of this newsletter.

Please rank these issues from 1 to 10 according to their importance to you, with 1 being most important.

_____ Budget and taxes

_____ Crime and security

_____ Education

_____ Energy

_____ Environment

_____ Family issues and moral values

_____ Health care

_____ Human services

_____ Jobs and economic development

_____ Land use and water

_____ Property taxes

_____ Transportation

_____ Other (please specify) _____

